



FASHION INTERNATIONAL

NEWS AND VIEWS OF THE INTERNATIONAL FASHION WORLD

OCTOBER/NOVEMBER '92

WORKERS FOR FREEDOM

*A conversation
with
Richard Nott
and
Graham Fraser*

Richard Nott and Graham Fraser are the talented two-some that comprise Workers For Freedom, the renowned British fashion partnership that was established in 1985. Winners of the prestigious U.K. Designer of the Year Award in 1989, their diverse backgrounds and skills complement each other. Richard Nott, the designer, was principal lecturer at Kingston Polytechnic and School of Fashion for ten years, prior to which he acted as assistant to Valentino in Rome. Graham Fraser, the company's busi-

ness manager, studied accounting before embarking on a career as fashion buyer and merchandise manager, with such London stores as Harrods and Liberty. When Fashion International's contributing editor, Bridget Biggane, interviewed the dynamic duo in their London showroom this past summer, they explained the origins of their enigmatic company name, shared their views of the fashion industry in both Europe and America, and expressed their excitement regarding a brand

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THE SPRING BUZZWORD

Fashion forecasting is a tricky business. While designers may opt for a certain "look," in the final analysis it's the customer who determines what's hot and what's not. With this maxim firmly in mind for Spring '93, the buzzword is definitely options.

With the long, lean skirt a Fall best seller, expect to see more of the same in every collection, although short hasn't been abandoned entirely. Newer still—the long, flared skirt. Always fluid, occasionally pleated, this silhouette makes the new lengths easier to handle for most women. Pants, from walk shorts to palazzos, make the whole hemline controversy a non-issue. Some of the trends that resurface: the "Out of Africa" theme which plays up safari and Afro-Colonial looks in a neutral

color palette. . . breezy nautical looks in solids and stripes. . . the moody blues, from chambray to linen. . . the '70s revival of lacings and bell-bottoms, and hippie looks for the young.

This season, the woman who wears CK CALVIN KLEIN will have a choice of overlapping identities — from hippie to urban chic, to ecologically sound — with silhouettes that are long, loose, and flowing. In a collection inspired by nature, fabrics (including tie-dyed silk, raw linen, raffia, and hopsack) combine coarse textures, frayed edges, hand pleating, and loose knits in a free relaxed way. Some typical examples include, a hemp burlap blazer, flax linen knit sweater, and a tie-dyed skirt. Another option is a silk double-breasted jacket that Calvin

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new design venture being launched this Fall with Britain's best known catalogue, Littlewoods.

BB: *Where did the name Workers for Freedom come from?*

RICHARD: Both of us were working in these high-powered jobs, and as always when you're working for those big organizations...there's an awful lot of restrictions...you can't really do things your way. We decided we'd learned so much, and it was so varied, that we had a lot to offer...so we decided to 'work for freedom'...so we became Workers For Freedom!

BB: *What customers did you have in mind for your collection?*

RICHARD: When we started, we really wanted to do menswear because we felt there was a gap in the market. Everything was very preppy looking and wherever you looked it was the same kind of clothes. We wanted to make a more decorative, sensitive collection. I think we hit the market at the right time...it was a new thing. Whether we influenced the change or whether people had the same idea at the same time, it just all fitted in very well. Very quickly, women also started to buy the clothes...especially the shirts. We found it was 50/50 men to women for a while. Then, once we started doing wholesale, it developed much more towards womenswear because their market's much bigger.

BB: *Where are you sold in the U.S.?*

GRAHAM: In Bendel, Saks Fifth Avenue, and Marshall Field's/Dayton Hudson. We use to sell to Macy's and to Bergdorf's, and to show in New York as part of our link-up with GFT Apparel.

RICHARD: The idea behind GFT was great, because they felt it was necessary to nurture new talent. So they did this amazingly long scouting tour and selected designers who they thought had staying power. They set up a little group with other European designers where we could all show

our collections — it was very good. Unfortunately, it disbanded.

BB: *Do you find the American market is different from the British market? Do you edit your collections, or even design especially for the American market?*

GRAHAM: When we've made personal appearances in America and talked to customers about our clothes, we've discovered the problem is that they tend to be rather expensive...with the duties etc. factored in. You've got to be a really well publicized name for the American market...The European names like Armani, Ungaro, or Escada, with the big advertising campaigns, get such huge advertising attention that everyone in the country knows them! We don't have the budget for that. We rely on editorial (American Vogue and Harper's), which is a very slow process because we don't have the collection there (in the U.S.) to be photographed. You need a big exposure to the American market for a line to be really successful. We do, however, have a good following in America. People call us from the U.S. and ask where they can get our clothes. We've also been on TV in America quite a lot with Elsa Klensch, and on other shows.

"The Spring Buzzword" continuea

throws over a twill vest, classic white tee, and silk pants. All of above are in indigo.

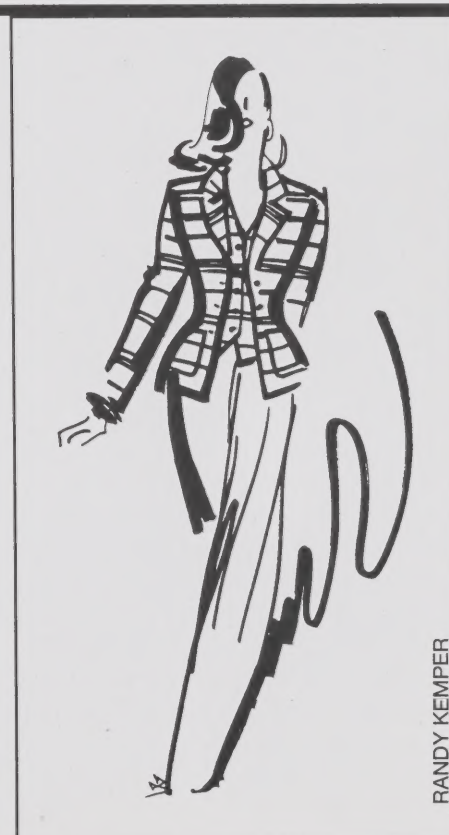
Also using luxurious natural fibers is ASSETS LONDON. Offering young contemporary knits with a '70s flavor, lean lines in a fragile palette of softened pales and off-white, update the hippie inspired openwork crochet tunics, lace-up romper, and poor-boy rib sweaters. Aquatic images overlaid with textural rippled surfaces, comprise a lovely group of sweaters. Luxurious fabrics juxtaposed with simplicity of styling is found at MONDI, where colors are also soft and subdued, with many tone-on-tone effects. Silhouettes stay slender, with skirt lengths variable. New aspects are the flowing '50s retro-inspired summer dresses, colonial style belted jackets, and vests which function as blouses. Great vests are always

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RICHARD: I think too, that although we are a 'hit' in Britain, the sort of clothes we do aren't typically English clothes...or what Americans think England does. You know, Americans are bombarded with the idea of what England is like...street fashions...quirky ideas. But we never really fit into that image. We wanted to make beautiful clothes of really fine quality. In America, I think, they've always found it difficult to place us because we're not part of the Helen Storey/Vivian Westwood lot. We're not part of those eveningwear people. We're something else.

GRAHAM: The stores aren't quite sure where to put us...It works most successfully when we're alongside Comme des Garçons...that kind of designer. And a lot of the American stores don't have those labels. The buyer at Bendel's was the first we ever had in America...she 'sniffed' us out. When she discovered us the rest followed. American buyers are very experimental! In Bergdorf's we were showcased in the wrong area...Dawn Mello was great to us, but she put us with Byblos on the fifth floor. We actually had people who were adapting our designs next to us! We couldn't sell to Galleries Lafayette in

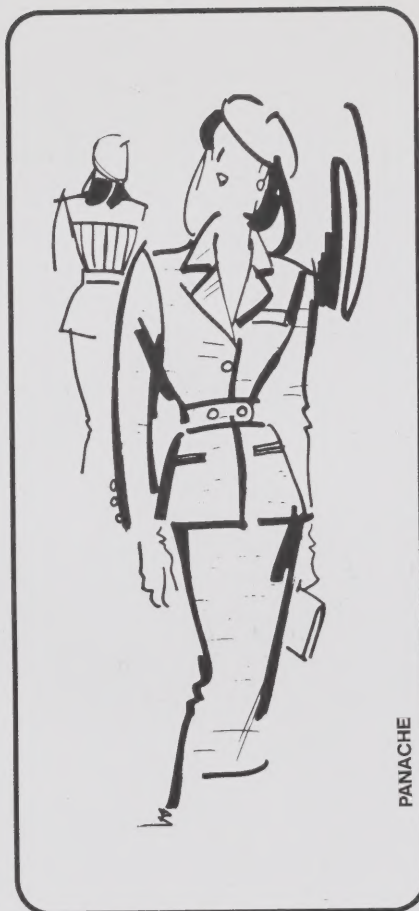
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and ink. Two outstanding suits are the double-breasted, shawl collared blazer with cutaway hemline and pleat trousers, and the notch collared safari jacket with epaulettes, waist tabs, and flap pockets. In laundered linen, this comes with cuffed walk shorts.

For luncheon and career dressing, quiet neutrals coupled with clean lines play major roles. At **TAHARI**, the emphasis is on soft clean silhouettes in moss crepe, viscose, silk blends and tropical wools. Here are some of the best neutral colored pantsuits, especially their safari look — a beige trouser suit with drawstring waist and cargo pockets in a novelty weave. Soft collars and pocket treatments are played up in this collection. The collar and pocket treatments are also important at **JONES NEW YORK SUITS**. There's a handsome notch collared belted suit that features patch pockets and a long slim skirt. The staples at this suit house are trousers and wardrobers, in viscose/linen blends, tropical wools or novelties. Their subtle neutrals such as clay, mocha, moss, and stone, look right for the season. **PANACHE**, making an auspicious debut with a capsule collection that is long, lean and timeless, offers colors that are equally understated — chamois, flax, navy, celadon, wheat, and peach. Designed for the woman who doesn't have to shout to be noticed, this collection comprised of silk shantung, 2-ply silk crepe, and sand-washed silk twill presents some outstanding pieces — the Norfolk jacket over a 34" slim skirt in 2-ply crepe, and the shantung wardrobers with their own coordinating coats.

Bold colors are often used in nautical themes, or in the contemporary collections. At **B. LOUISE LTD**, the motto is — for cool, cerebral fashions, look elsewhere. These suits make a statement. Imported wool gabardines, silks, and crepes are offered in brights or black. There's a lovely crepe suit with a car wash pleat skirt (in long or short lengths). The jacket has a notch collar, and flap pockets in reverse crepe black satin. A gold puffed heart button closes the jacket. From the new and exciting lower priced



GEORGE SIMONTON STUDIO

line, there's a subtle nautical influence. White/navy or white/red viscose is given a ladylike twist in suits with boldly striped city shorts. In fact, walk shorts make up a strong part of the collection. Spectator looks, and softly tailored trouser suits are another key direction here. From the designer line, don't overlook the cool wools, moss crepes, and viscose/silk blends. The latter fabrication is utilized in a stunning toast brown "safari" suit which is buttoned in faux tortoise. For an effect that is simultaneously soft and sharp — **RENEE DU MARR's** Italian rayon crepe suit in navy/white chalk stripes. Its double-breasted jacket, featuring peak lapels, has a nice long lean line, and is shown over a 34" white pleated skirt. Her young, updated suits play up shapely jackets, and offer a variety of skirt lengths and shapes. Pantsuits also turn up here. The collection's unusual imported novelties, Linton eyelash tweeds, silk yarn dyes, and crepes are wonderful and add a unique charm to her contemporary silhouettes!

"The Spring Buzzword" continued

signature pieces in **NIC JANIK's** collection — perfection with classic trousers, belted safari jackets, long slim skirts, or even walk shorts. Also favoring simplicity of line with soft muted colors, fabrics are again highlighted — softly striped viscose/rayon blends, stretch linen, silk blend sweaters, and raw silk knits. A charming way to spend the Summer could include his long flared sundress, that unbuttons to reveal shorts in a retro "Cactus" print.

For the office, the long, lean shirt-dress in white cotton jacquard, and a soft crepe sleeveless "safari" pocketed dress are perfect career choices from **S.G. GILBERT**. Working with a predominately neutral palette in linen blends, crepe, and jacquards, this dress resource also offers two and three piece ensembles as options. More sophisticated, and infinitely more wearable than in seasons past, is **COURREGES** — gabardines, cotton piques, failles, and linen are translated into dresses and separates also aimed at the career woman. A color blocked wool gabardine shift in mint and white, worn under a solid mint "mess" jacket, captures the essence of the line. More casual in approach is a white/brown zip-front linen blouson jacket, shown with a long side-buttoned brown skirt. Classic poor-boy ribs and breezy modern intarsia patterned sweaters bridge the generation gap. **JENNIFER JOANOU** (at Felicia Grace & Co.), reaches out to the urban career customer with a streamlined RTW collection in heathered rayon. Gently curved jackets mix/match with high-waisted full trousers or slender skirts. For soft and feminine dresses, **DANIELE JAMES WORTH** (The Next Generation), provides a look that can go from day to evening. Shift dresses with youthful floppy hemlines, tie-front tops, and fitted jackets are all in pure white or ivory cotton jacquard, eyelet, etc. A nice detail — the tiny flower buttons that grace some of the clothes.

In the sportswear category, a vivid habutai (lightweight Japanese silk)

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floral print side-slit tunic and wide-leg pants from GEIGER is an elegant day into evening choice. Adapting to the trends, their traditional designs are peppered with contemporary updates. Color explodes. . .lemon lime, raspberry, apple green, blue iris, etc. Cool wools, linen, voile, silks, and cotton are the fabrics chosen for short fitted jackets, blazers, and a variety of skirts and pants. On the other end of the color spectrum, EILEEN FISHER uses tender shades of oatmeal, sea, cocoa, sand, mint, coral rose, driftwood, and white, which combine in effortless combinations. She chooses soft fabrics — laundered crinkle rayons, sand-washed silk cord, and cotton cashmere for her minimalist separates, with essential pieces continuing to be a seven-button vest, tunic, long wrap skirt, and easy pull-on pants.

Accessible, adaptable sportswear that offers clear-cut choices is the thinking behind BARRY BRICKEN's new 2B collection. The line is composed of five groups: Neo-Classic, which mixes pieces in high contrast black and white; Romance on the Range, which throws together serape stripes with sexy lace-up bustiers; Cool Blues, that features, indigo leggings, polos and fisherman knits; Primitive Chic, Afro-Colonial with a long sueded cotton twill safari dress, laundered linen coordinates, and a jazzy beaded skirt; and Weekend Getaway, offering cool casual sportswear pieces in sun bleached pastels. The line is young, hip, sexy and always pulled together. RANDY KEMPER, another believer in distinctive options, shows four groups — African Expedition, a Royal Coronation, Las Brisas, and '40s Hollywood. A bold black and white striped cotton fitted jacket and vest go Hollywood, worn over a long

black viscose sarong or Hepburn trousers. This collection is sophisticated yet feminine, and truly for women who want to be noticed.

DKNY is in a blue mood, with chambray shirts, faded blue denim separates and indigo knits. A navy pinstriped double-breasted jacket, and cuffed shorts in tropical wool is worn over a natural cotton/viscose ribbed bodysuit. For the young and hip, sexy tea length dresses feature thigh high unbuttoned skirts. Also adopting a soft palette that leans heavily towards the blue tones is ISANI STUDIO. Here the '70s influence is apparent in an off-white washed canvas group which features tan lace-up detailing. The soft washed linen coordinates offer a fresh alternative to traditional blue denim. Other interesting fabrications include viscose linen checks, rayon embroidery, and cotton/spandex stripes. A change of pace is offered at ALLY CAPELLINO, where it's off to the regatta with boating stripes in navy/buttermilk cotton twill. Long fitted jackets with flap pocket detailing are worn over gilets and long front vented skirts. Madras checks and viscose/linen mixes, in brown, cream, and coral, work well for the Summer. Safari jackets and blazers mix with Bermuda shorts, or long wrap skirts. Cool sandwashed silk dresses have beaded straps and handkerchief hems. Midsummer calls for a blue/brown African blanket print. And, OUTLANDER touches all the bases for Spring — from tonal blue separates to African inspired sportswear, and nautical knits. A winner is the essential belted khaki safari jacket over animal printed full wrap skirt, or skinny pants.

Happy Thanksgiving



"Workers for Freedom" continued

and white. We've had our recognition in what we've done with the Designer's of the Year Award, but I find this (relationship with Littlewoods) very pleasing and flattering that people not only respect what we've done, but can see another life for it.

Editor's Note: Since this interview was conducted, Littlewoods, for their next catalogue, has more than doubled the number of pages devoted to Workers For Freedom designs.

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